

What Does it Mean “Not Under the Law”?

Speaking to Christians, Paul said, “...if you are led by the Spirit, *you are not under the law*” (Gal. 5:18). Also speaking to Christians, he said, “...you are not under the law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14).

What did Paul mean by these statements? Did he mean, as most churches teach, that God’s law does not *apply* to Christians?

First of all, we must understand what “sin” is. The *definition* of “sin” is given in I John 3:4---“sin **IS** the transgression of the law” (KJV). Likewise, in Rom.6:16, “sin” is shown to be the *opposite* of “obedience.”

But obedience to *what*? Transgression of *what* law? Paul answers this in the seventh chapter of Romans. There, he said, “I would not have known **what sin was** had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the **law** had not said, ‘You shall not covet’” (verse 7, NIV). Plainly, the “law” Paul is referring to is *the Ten Commandments*.

A few verses later, Paul said that “the law *is spiritual*” (verse 14). Therefore, it is the transgression of God’s *spiritual law*---as summarized by the Ten Commandments---that constitutes “sin.” That’s what sin **is**---disobeying God’s spiritual law!

Now that we know what sin is, is there a **penalty** imposed by God for our sinning---for our disobeying His spiritual law? Both the Old and New Testaments reveal that the penalty for sin is death! “The soul that sins shall die” (Ezek. 18:4). “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

Furthermore, we are told that “**ALL** have sinned” (Rom. 3:23). Therefore, *all* who have ever lived (except Jesus Christ) have sinned and *earned* the death penalty! “...death spread *to* all men, **because all sinned**” (Rom. 5:12).

When the Bible speaks of “salvation” or “being saved,” it’s speaking of being saved **from** the death penalty. And unless we *are* saved from the death penalty, then eternal death is what awaits us!

“Salvation” is the granting of life after death, as a glorified, spirit being---eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

Notice now the *entirety* of the scripture which we just partially cited: “For the wages of sin is death, but the *gift* of God is **eternal life** in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

Jesus Christ never sinned. He *never earned* the death penalty. Yet, He *paid* the death penalty *in our stead*! And it was because of the fact that His life is *worth more* than the sum total of all people who have ever lived, that His death **could** pay the penalty for all mankind.

Yet, this is what many people don’t understand: The Bible clearly shows that Christ’s sacrifice is **not automatically applied** to everyone! Rather, there are two *conditions* that a person must fulfill in order for Christ’s sacrifice to be applied to that individual: (1) You must accept Christ as your personal Savior (John 3:16), and (2) you must **repent**---i.e., turn *from* your past way of life (Rom. 6:3-6) and make an unconditional *surrender* to God (Luke 4:4; 22:42) that you will henceforth *strive* (Luke 13:24)---with the help of the Holy Spirit in you---to live in accordance with God’s spiritual *law*, as summarized by the Ten Commandments (Matt. 19:16-19; 7:21-23; 13:41-43).

Now, regarding these two *conditions* for Christ’s sacrifice to be applied to a person, most church-goers *accept* the first condition, but reject the condition of repentance (and what true repentance is). Yet, notice

these two scriptures: “**Repent** therefore and be converted, **that** your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). “But **IF** we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and *the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin*” (I John 1:7). So here we see that it’s only **IF** we walk in the light---**IF** we “walk in *newness of life*” and are no longer “slaves of sin” (Rom. 6: 4,6)---no longer slaves of transgressing God’s law (I John 3:4)---it’s only *then* that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us!

So, let’s now answer the question posed at the beginning of this article: What did Paul mean when he said that a Christian is “not under the law but under grace”?

He meant that a *Christian* is not under the **penalty** of the law! A Christian is one who has *fulfilled* the two conditions of accepting Christ and turning his life unto obedience to God’s law. And *having* fulfilled those conditions, Christ’s sacrifice is then applied TO that individual. The person is then under *grace*---divine **pardon** from the death penalty. His sins are *forgiven*---blotted out (Acts 3:19).

Christ’s blood pays the death penalty in that person’s *stead*. That person had *earned* the death penalty, by transgressing God’s law. But the penalty has now been paid, and so the individual is no longer *under* the penalty of the law; he’s no longer “*under the law*,” as Paul phrased it. He’s now under grace (divine pardon).

People think that Rom 6:14 does away with the law; but if they would just read the *very next* verse---verse 15---they would see that when you come under grace, you are **not** then free to transgress God’s law: “What then? Shall we sin [transgress God’s law] because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly **not!**” answered Paul (verse 15).

Consider this. Suppose that you had been caught *stealing* something, and you were brought to trial. The judge decides that in *this* case, he’s going to *pardon* you. Do you then think to yourself, “Wow, there’s no longer a law against stealing!”?

Did the judge do away with the *law*, or did he only do away with the *penalty* in your case? If stealing was unrighteous *before* you were forgiven, then isn’t it *still* unrighteous (Ps. 119:172)? Has the definition of moral and immoral changed? Again, Paul said that “**BY** the law *is* the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). (Also Rom. 7:7 and Matt. 13:41-43)

Why is it that people believe that the law which **defines** righteous and moral behavior has been done away?! A law that is of such **paramount importance**, that God sent His only begotten Son to **DIE**, as payment for our *breaking* that law?!

God’s spiritual law is the *way* to a happy and fulfilling life! Why would He *do away* with such a law?!

Finally, let’s realize that the Apostle Paul *totally advocated* the keeping of God’s spiritual law! Paul fully realized that God’s spiritual law *applies* to Christians!